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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001262

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA, NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/16/2018

TAGS: KWBG PHUM PREL PTER IS

SUBJECT: REACTION TO PRISONER EXCHANGE: PA CONCERNED ABOUT CONFLATION OF PRISONERS RELEASED TO ABBAS AND HIZBOLLAH

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Jessica Lapenn, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Palestinian Authority (PA) and Fatah leaders publicly cheered the release of Lebanese prisoners but privately feared that Hizbollah, not the PA, will receive credit for Palestinian prisoners released in the future. PA Prisoners Affairs Minister Ashraf Ajrami said the GOI has not discussed planned future prisoner releases with PA officials.

He and senior leaders said they worry that the GOI agreement with Hizbollah to release an unspecified number of Palestinian prisoners will undermine PA attempts to claim credit for future releases. They complained that the GOI's unwillingness to release prisoners to the PA also sends the message that fighting and kidnapping works to obtain prisoner releases, and peaceful negotiations are ineffectual. Hamas leaders praised the prisoner release, and former Hamas PM Ismayil Haniyah said captured Israeli soldier Cpl. Gilad Shalit will only be freed for a "just price." End summary.

Abbas' Office Welcomes Release

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¶2. (SBU) PA Presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeynah told local press July 16 that President Abbas welcomes the release of Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) terrorist Samir Kuntar and other Lebanese prisoners and is happy for the families of those who are freed. Abu Rudeynah said Abbas has been working hard to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners and hopes to achieve more prisoner releases soon.

PA Prisoners Minister: We Want Discussions with GOI on More Releases

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¶3. (C) PA Prisoners Affairs Minister Ajrami told POL FSN July 16 that he has no information on Palestinian prisoners who the GOI agreed to release in the context of the Hizbollah exchange, since the PA was not consulted. He said he wants to meet with Israeli Public Security Minister Avi Dichter to discuss a possible prisoner release pursuant to the July 14 meeting between PM Olmert and President Abbas in Paris. He said the Israelis have not responded to past PA meeting requests or to suggestions for defining prisoner release criteria. He said he is concerned that Hizbollah, not the PA, will receive credit for any future Palestinian prisoner releases, as the GOI has committed to a Palestinian prisoner release with Hizbollah and many will interpret any future release as fulfilling this agreement rather than as a PA achievement.

Fatah Officials: "Israeli Actions Show Only Fighting Achieves Results"

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¶4. (C) Fatah officials Qaddura Faris and Muhammad al-Madani similarly told POL FSN that they are concerned that

Palestinians will conflate the Israeli agreement with Hizbollah on Palestinian prisoners with future releases coordinated with President Abbas. Faris said months of PA attempts to engage the GOI on prisoner releases have proven ineffectual, and Palestinians thus are receiving a message that "only fighting achieves results with Israel." Publicly, Faris and other Fatah leaders congratulated the released Lebanese prisoners and urged the PA to strengthen efforts to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners.

¶15. (SBU) About 1200 Fatah activists rallied in Ramallah on July 16 and marched from Manara Square to Yasir Arafat's mausoleum at the Muqata'a to celebrate the prisoner release and return of the remains of Palestinian fighters to Lebanon. Fatah regional committee member Sa'id Yaqin told the crowd that slain militant "Dalal al-Mughrabi and all other Palestinian fighters will eventually be returned to the homeland for proper burial." Fatah Central Committee member Abdallah Ifranji paid tribute to Hizbollah for securing the prisoner release.

¶16. (SBU) Abbas Zaki, the Fatah/PLO representative to Lebanon, told Palestinian press that Hizbollah officials had confirmed that Dalal al-Mughrabi's remains are among those returned by the GOI, and 159 other sets of remains are being identified. (Note: There are conflicting media reports about whether al-Mughrabi's remains have been returned or are identifiable. End note).

Hamas: We Congratulate Hizbollah and Families;  
Shalit Only To Be Released for "Just Price"

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¶17. (SBU) Hamas leaders told Gaza-based press that the prisoner release is a victory for resistance. Ismayil Haniyah told press that he congratulated freed terrorist Samir Kuntar's stepmother, Um Jabr Wishah, in al-Burayj Refugee Camp, on Kuntar's release. Haniyah also told press that captured Israeli soldier Cpl. Gilad Shalit will only be released for a "just price."

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